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NATO ENLARGEMENT: A RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE

Seven Consequences of NATO Enlargement

ONE - Deepening of the gap between Russian and Western civilizations. Historically, this gap is the most important concern. As NATO enlargement reflects a consolidation of the Western (Romano-Germanic) world as a civilization, Russia's reaction could not help but reflect the consolidation of Russian civilization as distinct from the Western. Any eastward growth of NATO that would leave Russia outside the alliance would strike a severe, if not fatal, blow to Russian westernizers and greatly encourage their opponents. It could also cause the West to lose a unique opportunity to bring Russia closer to itself as a civilization which is the only way to solve the West's historical task of turning Russia into an ally, rather than an adversary.

Of course, this civilizational gap would be partly bridged by Russia's progress on the road to economic reforms and creation of a working market economy. But the decision of NATO to spread over the whole of Europe would leave Russia little choice but to assert itself as a force, not necessarily antagonistic but certainly different from the Western community.

TWO - An inward reorientation of Russia. Russia would consider its international role and national interests with less, not more, respect for the interests of Western countries. Although Russia has recently played by rules established by the West trying to find a role for itself within the international framework created by the West after the end of the Cold War NATO enlargement would cause it to become a more independent player, less constrained by a real or illusory partnership with the West. In the absence of strong strategic ties with the Western alliance, Russia might well become a loose cannon in world politics. The effect of such a reorientation on the fragile post-Cold War international system could be very serious.

THREE - A rebirth of the Russian sphere of influence among the former states of the Soviet Union. If Russia considers itself geopolitically cut off from Europe and the Euro-Atlantic community, it would have no choice but to strengthen its historical sphere of influence. This would certainly mean closer economic and military cooperation with Belarus and Kazakhstan, cooperation that has already started. Although Ukraine would be more of a problem, here, too, Russia has three powerful levers

especially its close ties between Russian and Ukrainian enterprises, Ukrainian dependence on Russian natural resources such as oil and gas, and the presence of 11 million native Russians on Ukrainian soil (more than 20 percent of the population of Ukraine). One might even argue that NATO enlargement would seriously limit Ukraine's freedom of maneuver in foreign policy. Therefore, it would adversely affect the geopolitical pluralism among the territories of the former USSR.

FOUR - A weakening of overall European security. Although the West considers it a means of strengthening Western security, and of providing effective security guarantees for Central and Eastern Europe, enlargement could deliver a severe blow to European security as a whole. Eventually, NATO would have to consider the entry of the Baltic states and perhaps even Ukraine into the alliance. Russia's predictably negative reaction, including attempts to exert pressure on Ukraine to dissuade it from joining NATO, would certainly strain relations between Kiev and Moscow, thus creating conditions for new tensions between Russia and the West. Any attempt to include Ukraine and the Baltic republics in a larger NATO would result in a major crisis between Russia and the West.

FIVE - A threat to the security structure already established after the end of the Cold War. As Vladimir Lukin, head of the State Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs predicts, the decision to enlarge NATO eastward would kill prospects for the ratification of the START II treaty in the Russian parliament and bring into question the future of the Treaty on Conventional Armaments in Europe and the Convention on Chemical Weapons. In his words, "NATO enlargement is the worst idea of all those that are connected with European security."

SIX - An unwelcome influence on internal Russian politics. NATO enlargement would strongly influence the political balance inside Russia on the eve of the parliamentary elections (scheduled for December) and presidential elections (scheduled for June 1996) in favor of anti-Western circles. If enlargement is adopted, those Russians who had tried to deal with NATO would be attacked in both electoral campaigns by anti-Western and nationalist forces within Russia. The West could find itself in the extremely controversial position of having to back those in Russia who favor the postponement of elections and even the establishment of a dictatorial regime out of fear that elections might bring highly undesirable results for the West.

SEVEN - Encouragement of a new militarism in Russia. NATO enlargement could result in the promotion of Russian military officers who favor a stronger military posture to key positions. They would probably position troops on the western border of Russia and in Belarus and the Kaliningrad area. The so-called flank restrictions of CFE would be disregarded. All in all, NATO's eastern borders would emerge as a new dividing line of distrust on the European continent.

The First Battle Against Expansion And PFP

The Mamedov Visit To Washington

NATO's Strategy of Enhanced Cooperation

The NATO strategy combining enlargement with a parallel enhancement of cooperation with Russia could hardly bring about the desired results because such cooperation coupled with NATO enlargement is viewed in Russia as an obvious contradiction: Either we trust each other (we cooperate, making enlargement meaningless), or we do not trust each other (cooperation becomes moot). In the words of President Yeltsin's Security Advisor Yuri Baturin, "The hopes for combining NATO enlargement with the establishment of special partner relations with Russia are fairly weak. NATO's enlargement would

sap the basis for such partnership because Russia cannot see this step as anything but unfriendly."

The idea of a non-aggression or strategic cooperation treaty (which in the beginning of 1994 enjoyed some support in Moscow) now holds little promise. Such a treaty would have to be ratified by all NATO member-states. If it is not accepted by even one member-state, Russia would face an enlarged NATO without any sort of strategic compensation. Finally, it may be safely predicted that, after the decision is adopted by NATO, the negative domestic reaction in Russia would make it almost impossible for any government to conduct effective talks on Russia-NATO cooperation.

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